

VZCZCXRO2713
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK
DE RUEHDIR #0052/01 3091438
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 041438Z NOV 08
FM RPO DUBAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0315
INFO RUEHDIR/RPO DUBAI 0310
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 0246
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0278
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASH DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000052

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/4/2018

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: BAHAI FAMILY OFFERS GLIMPSE INTO BAHAI EXPERIENCE IN IRAN

DUBAI 00000052 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Ramin Asgard, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: IRPO Officer met on October 29 with an Iranian Baha'i family to discuss the conditions facing Baha'is in Iran. The family confirmed existing reporting regarding the persecution Baha'is face and provided detail into how the IRIG tracks the Baha'i population, operations of the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, attitudes of Baha'i youth, and the Baha'is' assimilation into Persian society. Iranian Baha'is continue to be persecuted in Iran, facing restrictions on practicing their religion, finding employment, and pursuing an education. End summary.

¶2. (C) The family reiterated that conditions in Iran for Baha'is are very difficult; Baha'is cannot freely practice their religion, are unable to attend universities in Iran, cannot work for the government, and cannot receive a pension. Additionally, the IRIG bars Baha'is from employment in certain private sectors, such as barber shops or groceries, because Baha'is are considered unclean. The father of the family has a construction company. The family indicated that they feel daily pressure from the government, but this appears to stem from the general circumstances facing Baha'is rather than daily IRIG harassment.

¶3. (C) However, the family reported that the government does monitor the Baha'i population closely. When entering primary and secondary school, all children are required to disclose their religion on the entrance forms and provide the identities and addresses of their extended family members. In the case of Baha'i students, the family detail is passed on to the Ministry of Information and Security (MOIS). The family also indicated that the MOIS will send representatives to observe Baha'is when they are gathering with non-Baha'is. The father recalled being at a funeral when a friend of his pointed out a purported MOIS observer. Although Baha'is are not blocked from socializing with non-Baha'is, the family said the MOIS will question non-Baha'is about their association with Baha'is. Finally, per a government decree, Baha'is, when gathering with other Baha'is, may not do so in groups greater than 20.

¶4. (U) Until "several" years ago, the family indicated that the IRIG held their passports, preventing them from traveling outside of the country. Although the family does not know why the IRIG reversed policy, they have heard that the IRIG now wanted Baha'is to leave the country and not return.

¶5. (C) The family's daughter attends the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) in Iran. (Background: According to the

school's website, Baha'is founded the school in 1987 to provide their community with access to higher education. The IRIG knows about the school but apparently turns a blind eye to it. The family did not know why it was allowed to operate.) According to the daughter, the school has approximately 2,500 students from all over Iran. It is a 4-year program with classes in 14 different fields. Classes meet daily online, and she also travels to Tehran 3-4 times per semester for classes with her classmates. All classes have less than 20 students to comply with the aforementioned IRIG decree. The university degree is not valid in Iran, but according to the family, it is accepted by some Western universities. The daughter indicated that many young Baha'is want to pursue advanced degrees in Western universities. Her father interjected that after doing so, most want to return to Iran and help educate Iranians. He noted that most Iranian schools are not very good and the Baha'i community wants to help improve the education system.

¶16. (C) When asked why they stay in Iran, the family responded that their religion was founded in Iran and that they love Iran. The family said they liked other Iranians, including non-Baha'is, and are socially engaged in mixed groups. The daughter, for example, sings in a choir that includes Muslims and Baha'is. The family said non-governmental Iranians do not dislike Bahai's and tend to disregard IRIG anti-Baha'i propaganda.

¶17. (C) The family deemed IRIG accusations that Nobel Peace Prize laureate and lawyer Shirin Ebadi's daughter is Baha'i to be completely false (The allegations were made in government-owned media sources and conservative newspapers). They said the accusations were a bid to tarnish Ebadi's reputation because she is defending seven imprisoned members of the Baha'i leadership. The families' comments are consistent with Ebadi's; according to the family, few in Iran believe the claims.

DUBAI 00000052 002.2 OF 002

¶18. (C) Comment: The family provided welcome insight into their daily lives in Iran. Although Baha'is face persecution in Iran, and the rigors of living in Iran as a Baha'i was clear from their comments, they spoke passionately about Iran and were optimistic that conditions would eventually improve even while noting greater difficulties after President Ahmadinejad's 2005 election. The family as a whole was very open to IRPO officer's questions and seemed to support greater USG action on behalf of the Iranian Baha'is.
ASGARD